

Thank you State Superintendent Hofmeister and State Board Members for the opportunity to present and answer questions today. My name is Matt Wilson and I'm the Superintendent of Sovereign Community School. I'm an ex-knucklehead, high school dropout who hated school but I'm now proud to lead Sovereign Community School as I know that my students face many of the challenges I was lucky to overcome.

Sovereign is positioned to become an outstanding school and will fill a unique and special place in the history of Oklahoma public education. What our school offers that sets us apart from others is our approach to curriculum and wellness focus that provides stability and consistency for our students. Our school has data-driven practices, and we are excited by the academic and cultural growth we have documented in our first year. Our students took the NWEA Map Growth in Fall 2019 and Winter 2020 and in this short time, the students demonstrated significant growth. Due to the shutdown, we were unable to see the additional growth this Spring but are confident our students continued to progress.

While our first year has been successful from an academic and cultural viewpoint, our school faces significant financial challenges related to our school's opening and subsequent mistakes related to school spending. In June 2019, we enrolled over 180 students and hired staff to serve them. In July 2019, we were surprised to learn the facility we leased for our first year failed to pass a fire inspection, and modifications necessary to bring it up to code were both too expensive and would take too long to fix before the school year started. We frantically searched for an alternative facility and after a few weeks of delays, we found one. We ultimately landed in a much nicer facility and are excited by the long-term growth possibilities. But in the process we lost most of our student body, opening the school year with less than 40 students. I am excited and eager to announce that we have now more than quadrupled next year's enrollment numbers to 160, and our recruitment efforts haven't even officially started.

When the school year started with this small number of students, we chose not to cut back on our staff, reasoning that our staff had committed to this new academic and cultural model, and we worried that removing staff could impact our launch.

Instead, we expected to increase enrollment and fundraise to cover the projected shortfall. Our peak enrollment at the end of the 1st semester was 53, but most of our growth occurred after October 1, which did not help our financial situation and was still significantly lower than what we were staffed for during our first year.

When we recognized the financial shortfall in January 2020, our board immediately focused on fundraising and we reached out to many tribes for support. Initial conversations with tribal leaders were encouraging but then COVID-19 slowed and then halted these talks, as tribal finances have also been significantly impacted.

So I began looking for alternate solutions to save Sovereign Community School. Through many discussions and meetings, I was told Santa Fe South might be able to help.

We met with Santa Fe South to determine how we could help one another and keep Sovereign Community School open. With no official agreement or contracts in place, the discussion of a possible "merger" seemed worth pursuing. The Sovereign Community

School board met on Tuesday, April 14, 2020, and solicited feedback from our families and staff. After many hours of open conversation, the board agreed to formally approach Santa Fe South about the merger.

Santa Fe South held two board meetings on April 20th and April 27, 2020. At the end of the second board meeting, they also agreed to merger discussions. Heeding advice to focus on increasing student enrollment for next year, I asked to post the good news on the Sovereign Community School Facebook page. This was my error: I failed to recognize the importance of first reaching an agreement with our school's sponsor, the State Board of Education, before making a formal announcement. I regret this mistake and apologize for it.

Today we present the State Board with a draft proposal between Santa Fe South and Sovereign Community School we believe will benefit the Sovereign Community School students and community and both entities. We request the state board consider approving this merger.

If you approve, Santa Fe South will assume the Sovereign Community School contract and operate the campus. Santa Fe South will resolve the financial shortfalls Sovereign Community School faces, ensuring that Sovereign Community School meets all financial obligations for this school year and remains open for next.

The Sovereign Community School campus will remain independent and maintain its current brand. The Sovereign Community School board will remain in place, with an advisory role. Sovereign Community School employees will be hired as Santa Fe South employees and over the next three years, the Sovereign Community School board will fundraise to repay Santa Fe South's financial support and launch Sovereign Community School as an independent school. Most importantly, this will continue Sovereign's mission and vision. Our curriculum will continue to be created in the image of our mission. Although our schools would unite, Sovereign will retain its autonomy.

I am excited to partner with Santa Fe South as I believe this merger will provide us with short-term financial stability so we can focus on growing our students' academic and cultural successes witnessed in our first year. Thank you.